

Remarks at the Port of Tampa in Tampa, Florida

April 13, 2012

Hello, Tampa! Well, it is great to be here in Tampa. Good to be in Florida. I just got a tour of this magnificent port. I was hoping to try out one the cranes—[*laughter*]—Secret Service wouldn't let me. They don't let me have fun. They were more concerned about your safety than mine, though—[*laughter*]—they didn't want me messing anything up.

I want to thank David for that introduction. I want to thank Mayor Buckhorn for welcoming us to Tampa. I want to thank an outstanding Member of Congress, Kathy Castor, for joining us here today.

Now, if you guys have chairs, feel free to sit down—some of you do. I don't want you to feel—it's warm in here, we want you to—I don't want anybody dropping off. [*Laughter*] I've been talking a lot lately about the fundamental choice that we face as a country. We can either settle for a country where a shrinking number of people do really, really well, while a growing number are struggling to get by, or we can build an economy where everybody gets a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody is playing by the same set of rules.

Now part of building that economy is making sure that we're not a country that's known just for what we buy and what we consume. After all, our middle class was built by workers who invented products and made products and sold products—the best in the world—all around the world. Our economy was thriving when shipping containers left ports like this packed with goods that were stamped with three proud words: Made in America. And those exports supported a lot of good-paying jobs in America, including right here in Florida.

That's the country I want us to be again. And that's why, 2 years ago, I set the goal of doubling American exports by the end of 2014. Today, with the trade agreements that I've signed into law, we're on track to meet that goal. Soon, there are going to be millions of new customers for American goods in South Korea, in Colombia, in Panama. Soon there will be new cars on the streets of Seoul that are imported from Detroit and Toledo and Chicago.

And that's progress. And I want to thank two key members of my Cabinet who are here today—Labor Secretary Hilda Solis is in the house and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk—because they worked really hard to make this happen.

Now, one of the ways that we've helped American businesses sell their products around the world is by calling out our competitors, making sure they're playing by the same rules. For example, we've brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last administration. We just brought a new case last month. And we've set up a trade enforcement unit that's designed to investigate any questionable trade practices taking place anywhere in the world. See, we're going to take action whenever other countries are skirting the rules, breaking the rules, and putting our workers and our businesses at an unfair position.

We're also going to make sure that you've got access to more customers. Ninety-five percent of the world's consumers live outside our borders. We want them buying our products. And I'm willing to go anywhere in the world to open up new markets for American businesses. In fact, that's what I'm going to be doing right after this visit to Tampa. I'm heading to Colombia to take part in the Summit of the Americas, which brings together leaders from the Caribbean and from North, South, and Central America.

Everybody here knows how critical this part of the world is to our economy and to creating jobs. A lot of the countries in the region are on the rise. In Latin America alone, over the past decade, tens of millions of people have stepped out of poverty and into the middle class. So they're now in a position to start buying American products. That means they've got more money to spend. We want them spending money on American-made goods, that American businesses can put more Americans back to work.

Now the good news is already our exports to the Western Hemisphere are up by 46 percent since 2009. I want to repeat that because that's obviously important to Tampa. Tampa is one of the biggest ports in the country and a lot of the business being done here has to do with trade between us and Latin America. So the fact that it has gone up 46 percent since 2009 is a big deal for Tampa. In Florida, exports to this region are up nearly 30 percent. We now export more to the Western Hemisphere than to any other region in the world. And those exports support nearly 4 million U.S. jobs.

This is one of the most active trading relationships in the world and you see it up close here at the Port of Tampa. Every year, more than 2.5 million tons of fertilizer head out from here to farmers in the Caribbean and Central and South America. Engine oils that are produced not far from this port get shipped to countries throughout the hemisphere. Everything from recycled steel to animal feed gets sent from here to customers all across Latin America.

So while I'm in Colombia talking with other—leaders, I'm going to be thinking about you. I'm going to be thinking about how we can get more businesses like David's access to more markets and more customers in the region because I want us selling stuff and I want to put more Americans back to work.

One of the new things that we're doing is launching something called the Small Business Network of the Americas. Obviously, a lot of the exports that leave from America to other places are big business and that's great, we want our big corporations successful, selling products all around the world because we've got a lot of small businesses that are suppliers to those big business. But we also want our small and medium-sized businesses to have access to these markets. So this initiative is going to help our small businesses: Latino-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, African American-owned businesses. We want every business to be able to access these new markets, start exporting to these countries. So it'll make—this initiative will make it easier for them to get financing, it will link them up with foreign buyers who are interested in their products.

I've always said that the true engine of job creation in this country is the private sector, not Washington. Our job in Government is to help businesses grow and to hire, to create platforms for their success. That's one of the reasons I've cut taxes 17 times for small businesses. That's why I've fought to tear down barriers that were preventing entrepreneurs from getting funding. And that's why, yes, I've traveled around the world, opening new markets, so that American businesses can better compete in the global marketplace.

See, ultimately, this is what America is about. We're a nation of doers and a nation of builders. And we've never shied away from competition. We thrive on competition. If the global playing field is level, then America is going to win. So as long as I'm President, I'm going to keep on doing everything I can to give our workers and our businesses the opportunity to succeed.

That's how we're going to make this recovery felt by all people. It's how we're going to make sure that we build not just from the top down, but from the bottom up and from the middle out. It's how we're going to make sure that everybody has a fair shot. It's how we're going to make sure that anybody who wants a job can find one. And anybody who wants to succeed and live out that American Dream has the opportunity to do so.

We've gone through 3 very tough years with this global financial crisis—worst crisis we've seen in a generation. And as I travel around the country and I talk to our workers and I talk to our businesses, you can't help, but have confidence. We don't quit. We are resilient. We stay with it. We are the most inventive country in the world. We've got the best entrepreneurs in the world. We've got the best universities in the world. We've got the best research in the world. We've got the best infrastructure in the world, and we're going to keep on at it and make sure that the 21st century is the American century, just like the 20th century.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:12 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to David Hale, president, Tampa Tank Inc. and Florida Structural Steel; and Mayor Bob Buckhorn of Tampa.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Port of Tampa in Tampa, FL.

Locations: Tampa, FL.

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